

HEALTHCARE

## Surgeon general demands data on COVID-19 misinformation from major tech firms

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U.S. Surgeon General [Vivek Murthy](#) has reportedly asked Big Tech companies to hand over data regarding COVID-19 misinformation, [The New York Times](#) reported on Thursday.

In a formal notice, Murthy requested major tech platforms submit information about the prevalence and scale of COVID-19 misinformation on their sites, from social networks, search engines, crowdsourced platforms, e-commerce platforms and instant messaging systems.

The Surgeon general last summer [issued an advisory](#) calling health misinformation an “urgent threat,” and urging tech and social media platforms to redesign algorithms to reduce misinformation amplification and to bolster their monitoring of it.

“It can cause confusion, sow distrust, and undermine public health efforts, including our ongoing work to end the COVID-19 pandemic,” Murthy said in a statement in July.

During the pandemic, COVID-19 misinformation has spread rapidly amid contentious debates over masks, vaccinations and basic public health data, including the number of deaths reported by states or federal governments.

Misinformation about vaccinations took center stage earlier this year when Neil Young said he would pull his music off the music platform Spotify in protest over podcast host Joe Rogan, who had interviewed guests questioning the efficacy and safety of COVID-19 vaccines.

President Biden on Wednesday unveiled a new pandemic roadmap. Part of that plan will “equip Americans with tools to identify misinformation and to invest in longer-term efforts to build resilience against health misinformation.”

In his notice to major tech platforms, Murthy is requesting specific information on demographics affected by misinformation as well as sources of misinformation and “exactly how many users saw or may have been exposed to instances of Covid-19 misinformation,” according to the notice reviewed by The Times.

“Technology companies now have the opportunity to be open and transparent with the American people about the misinformation on their platforms,” Murthy said in a statement. “This is about protecting the nation’s health.”